



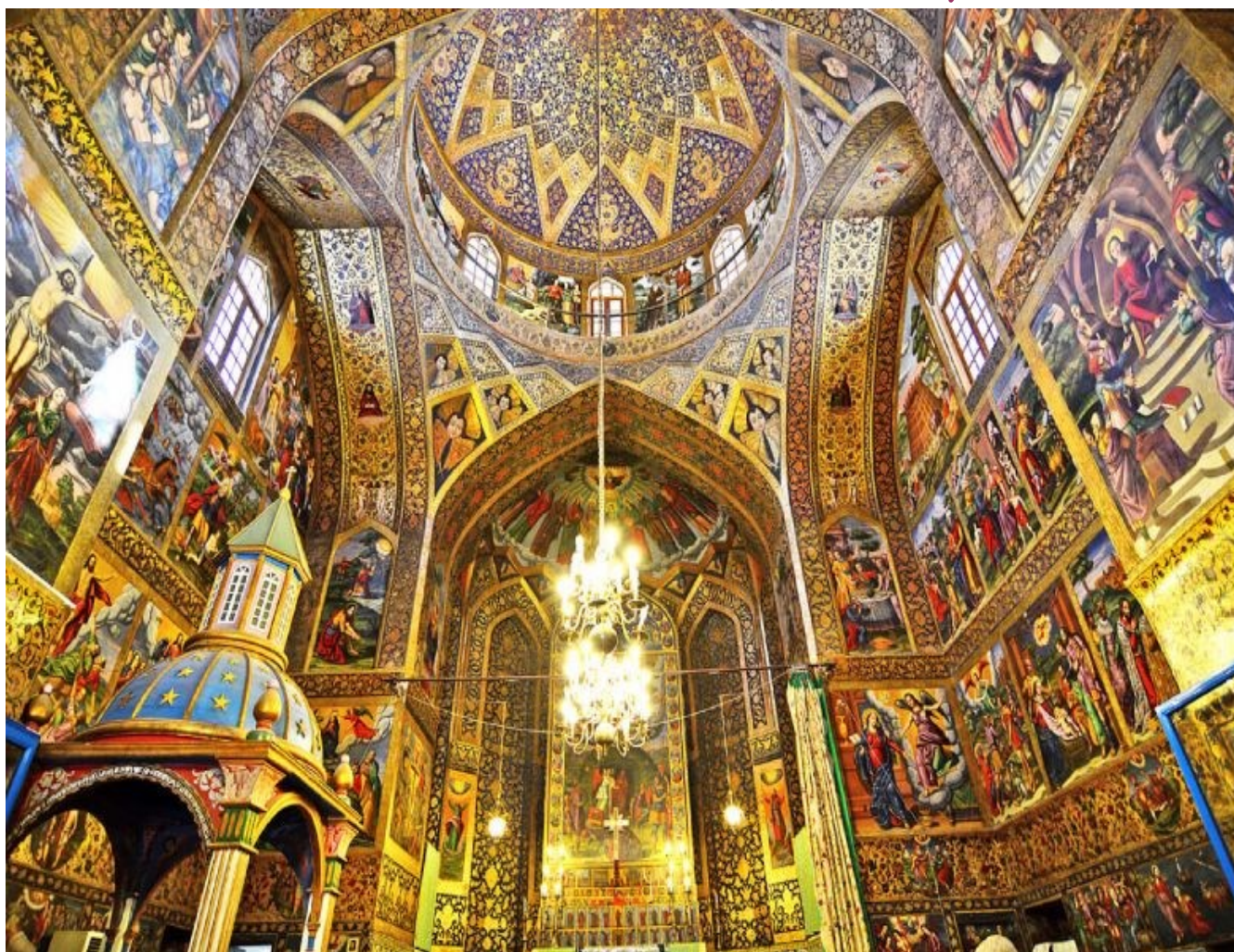
Islamic Republic of Iran

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MFA DIGEST

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2026



Vank Church in Isfahan, Iran

Issue #118 December 16— 30





MFA NEWSLETTER

Iran's President extends Christmas, New Year greetings to Pope, wishes peace across world



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian observed Christmas on Thursday by issuing an English-language message honoring Jesus Christ as a symbol of mercy, justice and compassion, extending greetings to Christians in Iran and worldwide, according to a post on his official X account in Tehran.

In the message, published on December 25 to coincide with Christmas Day in the Gregorian calendar, Pezeshkian said Jesus Christ is “revered in our tradition as a messenger of compassion, justice, and mercy,” and expressed hope that his teachings would continue to inspire dignity and peace among nations, president.ir reported.

The statement, addressed to Christians in Iran and abroad, emphasized themes of interfaith respect and coexistence, framing Jesus Christ as a shared moral figure whose message transcends religious boundaries.

Pezeshkian described Christ's teachings as timeless and relevant to contemporary global challenges, emphasizing peace and human dignity as universal values.

In a separate congratulatory message sent the same day to Pope Leo XIV, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pezeshkian marked both Christmas and the start of the 2026 Gregorian New Year.

In that message, he highlighted spiritual virtues attributed to Jesus Christ, including justice, freedom and compassion, which he said are also praised in the Qur'an.

Pezeshkian said global challenges require collective wisdom and reflection, calling for independent and responsible action by political leaders and intellectuals to steer the international community away from conflict and toward peace and stability.

He concluded by wishing health to the pope and peace and prosperity to Christian communities worldwide.

Later on Thursday evening, Pezeshkian visited the Tehran home of the family of Razmik Khachatorian, a Christian Iranian killed during the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq war, to commemorate Christmas and honor the role of religious minorities in the country's modern history.

During the meeting, Pezeshkian paid tribute to Khachatorian's memory and praised the contributions of Iranian Christians to national unity and territorial integrity.

He described the participation of Christian citizens in the war as a visible expression of solidarity across ethnic and religious lines.

Ara Shahverdyan, the parliamentary representative of Iran's Christian community, attended the meeting and thanked the president for the visit, reaffirming the community's commitment to public service and national cohesion.

Iran officially recognizes Christianity as a minority religion, with Armenian and Assyrian communities maintaining seats in parliament.





MFA NEWSLETTER

Iranian Foreign Minister's Visit to Russia



Aragchi meets with Russian MPs in Duma



Aragchi's Speech in Moscow State Institute of International Relations



Aragchi meets with Russian Foreign Minister in Moscow



Aragchi signs MoU with Lavrov on Political Consultations



Aragchi , Lavrov Hold Press Conference in Moscow



Iranian, Russian Delegations Meet for Consultations





MFA NEWSLETTER

Iran's Foreign Minister held telephone conversations with his counterparts from Cyprus, UK, Venezuela, Egypt and Pakistan to discuss regional and international developments as well as issues of mutual interest.



Venezuelan FM



Egyptian FM



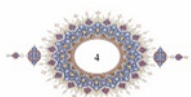
Pakistani FM



UK Foreign Secretary



Cyprus FM





IRAN NATURE

MOUNT SABALAN



Mount Sabalan is the third most prominent peak in Iran with 4811 meters of altitude and is located in the northwestern part of Iran in Ardabil province.

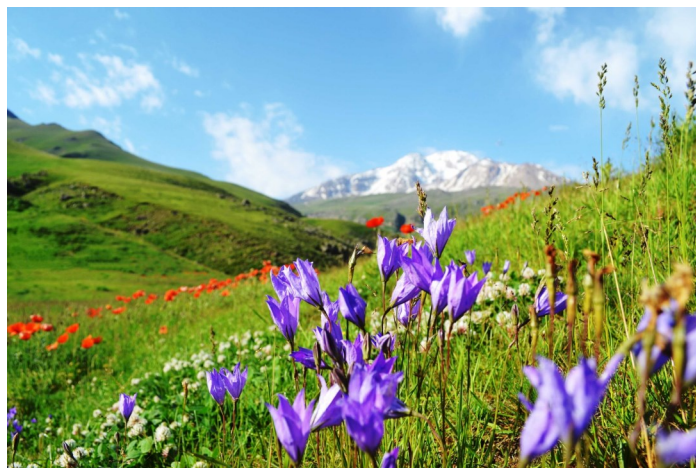
Sabalan is Iran's 3rd highest mountain after Mount Damavand and Mount Alam. Also, it is the world's 66th prominent peak. Located in the northwest of Iran, in Ardabil Province, Sabalan is a semi-active volcano and among Iran's highest mountains. Its beautiful nature in summer, the hot springs on its slopes, and Alvares Ski Resort make Sabalan a tourist magnet.

Geographical features

Scientists believe Sabalan to be a potentially active volcano; however, there is no information on its last eruption. The sulfuric springs, hot springs, and emission of dense gases are signs of its potentially-active state.

Parallel to Arasbaran Forest and with a length of 60km and a width of 45km, Sabalan (6000 km²) extends from Meshgin Shahr and Ahar in the north. It neighbors Sarab in the south, Ardebil in the east, and Tabriz in the west. Sabalan has 5 peaks which are covered with ice and snow all year round. The highest of its peaks, Soltan (4811m), is Iran's 3rd highest mountain after Damavand and Alam. Heram Dag and Kasra are the mountain's 2 other famous peaks.

Heram Dag includes 3 peaks between 4500-4600 meters which are technically difficult to ascend. After Soltan and Heram Dag, Kasra Peak (4470m) is the third highest peak on the mountain. Sabalan has 5 natural glaciers, 2 on Soltan's northern face, 2 on Kasra's foot, and one on Heram Dag's foot.





IRAN NATURE

Sabalan's Lake



The lake located on the Soltan peak (the main peak of Sabalan) makes it one of the unique mountains in Iran. This magnificent lake is one of the most beautiful lakes in Iran. It's nearly 16 meters deep and is frozen for most of the year.

This lake alongside the peaks of Mount Sabalan and the natural glaciers attracts many mountaineers yearly. Soltan Peak is the most popular due to its high altitude and its beautiful lake. Mount Sabalan is one of the Iranian national heritages.

Alvares Ski Resort



30 km to Sareyn city, you can find Alvares, a village on the southern foot of Sabalan. The village houses one of Iran's most popular and attractive ski resorts. Even if you're not a professional skier, I recommend enjoying the beauty and other facilities of this resort.

Cultural significance

Sabalan is so precious to the people of Ardebil that they call it Sultan Savalan (Sabalan in the local dialect). They believe it is the mountain where the ancient Persian prophet, Zoroaster, received a revelation. Some even believe him to be buried somewhere near the crater lake. Friedrich Nietzsche's masterpiece 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' also mentions Zoroaster descending Mount Sabalan.

Sabalan natural habitat

Some 156 plant species have been identified in the Sahand Protected Area, 26 of which are endemic. Types of plant species in the highlands include Astragalus, Acantholimon, and Euphorbia are scattered in the northeastern slopes, and are usually used as a winter habitat for wild goats.

Significant species of Sahand protected area include Armenian mouflon, caracal, brown bear, leopard, wild cat, weasel, wolf, fox, bats, and various types of rodents.





SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

WELFARE ORGANIZATION, TAJIKISTAN HEALTH MINISTRY TO BOOST TIES



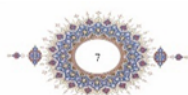
The head of the Welfare Organization, Javad Hosseini, and the deputy minister of Tajikistan's Health and Social Protection, Muhiddin Khayrullozoda, have agreed to boost cooperation in the welfare and social empowerment sectors.

During a meeting in Dushanbe on Tuesday, the officials also decided to develop a joint roadmap to expand collaborative efforts, IRIB reported. Meanwhile, the two sides highlighted cultural and historical commonalities between Iran and Tajikistan. The main axes of the meeting focused on empowering vulnerable groups of society, like people with disabilities or children who have no parents, fostering ties in education and technology fields, training Tajik social workers and psychologists, as well as sharing technical knowledge and experiences.

HOMEGROWN RADIOPHARMACEUTICALS ABLE TO TREAT 30 CANCER TYPES



Stating that Iran nuclear therapeutics are among the best in the world, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) emphasized that one or two homegrown radiopharmaceuticals are cable of treating 30 cancer types. Speaking among reporters on Thursday, Mohammad Eslami noted that cancer is spreading increasingly in the country and the role of the organization in producing effective and therapeutic products can help patients be treated more effectively by bringing together various medical groups working in the field of cancer. He further pointed out that radiopharmaceuticals produced recently in the country are among the best in the world, adding, "We are proud that noble nation of Islamic Iran can benefit from these medicines."





CULTURE & SOCIETY

CENTRAL ASIAN WRITERS, POETS AND PHYSICIANS VISIT HISTORICAL SITES IN HAMEDAN



A delegation of 23 poets, writers and medical professionals from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan visited historical sites and medical facilities in Iran's western province of Hamedan as part of a cultural and scientific exchange program.

The group arrived in Hamedan on Friday to explore opportunities for cooperation in culture, science and tourism and held meetings with provincial officials during the visit, Miras Aria reported.

The program aims to review and expand cooperation in the fields of Iranian and Tajik traditional medicine, exchange experiences in healthcare, and assess Hamedan's tourism and medical capacities.

As part of the visit, the delegation toured Hamedan's specialized heart hospital to discuss potential collaboration in medical tourism and exchanges between universities and medical centers, the news agency added.

The group also visited several of the province's major historical landmarks as part of efforts to familiarize participants with Hamedan's cultural heritage and tourism infrastructure.

IRAN-KAZAKHSTAN CULTURAL NIGHT HELD IN TEHRAN TO PROMOTE SHARED HERITAGE



Iran and Kazakhstan held a joint cultural night at Tehran's Niavaran Palace complex on Monday to promote shared heritage and strengthen cultural diplomacy between the two Caspian Sea countries, officials said.

The event, titled "Shared Heritage, Enduring Bond," was organised by Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts in cooperation with the Kazakh embassy in Tehran. Senior officials from both countries attended the ceremony, along with ambassadors from several nations and representatives from cultural and artistic communities.

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran, Ontalap Onalbayev, and Hojjatollah Ayoubi, head of the ministry's International Affairs and Cultural Diplomacy Centre, delivered speeches at the event, ISNA reported.





CULTURE & SOCIETY

IRAN'S ILAM, IRAQ'S KARBALA DISCUSS JOINT TOURISM EXHIBITION



Iranian and Iraqi officials have reached an initial agreement to hold a joint handicrafts and tourism exhibition in Iraq, Ilam's cultural heritage chief said, following talks between provincial authorities.

Farzad Sharifi, director general of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts of Ilam province, said the agreement was reached during a visit by Ilam's governor-general and an accompanying delegation to Iraq, Miras Aria reported.

Sharifi said the Ilam delegation met with the governor-general of Karbala to discuss expanding cultural and tourism cooperation between the two provinces.

He said it was agreed, at the request of the Ilam governor-general, that a specialized exhibition focusing on Ilam's handicrafts and tourism capacities would be held in Iraq in the near future, a proposal that was welcomed by the Iraqi side.

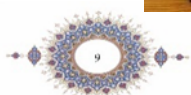
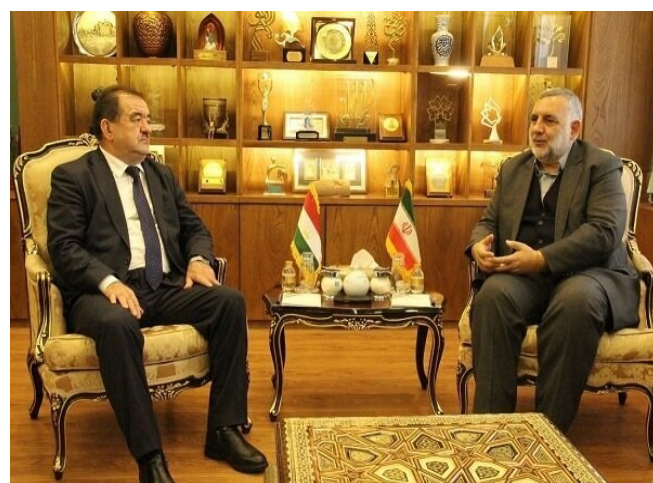
IRAN, TAJIKISTAN STRENGTHEN CULTURAL TIES

Iranian Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Mohsen Javadi met with Tajik Deputy Culture Minister Davlat Safarzadeh in Tehran on Saturday, emphasizing the strong ties between Iran and Tajikistan.

The meeting was held with the presence of advisors, Iranian cultural officials, and the cultural attaché of Tajikistan in Tehran, Mehr reported.

At the outset of the meeting, Javadi referred to the historical, cultural, and linguistic bonds between Iran and Tajikistan, noting that shared language and cultural commonalities have fostered broader interactions compared to many other nations.

"The strong ties between Iran and Tajikistan open extensive avenues for expanding cooperation in the fields of culture, science, and the arts," he noted.





TRADE & ECONOMY

TAJIKISTAN SEEKS BROADER CIVIL AVIATION COOPERATION WITH IRAN



Tajikistan has called for expanding cooperation with Iran in civil aviation, praising the technical expertise and professional approach of Iranian aviation officials following a joint safety oversight mission, state media reported.

The head of Tajikistan's Civil Aviation Authority commended Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) team, describing its technical capacity and level of cooperation as exceptional, and urged continued and wider collaboration across multiple areas of civil aviation.

The remarks followed a visit by Iranian aviation experts to Tajikistan under a bilateral memorandum of understanding, aimed at strengthening international cooperation on aviation safety oversight.

During the mission, the Iranian team conducted a comprehensive internal audit of Tajikistan's aviation safety oversight system across eight core areas.

IRAN'S EXPORTS TO EURASIA HIT \$1.2B IN 7 MONTHS: TPOI



An official at Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) says the country exported \$1.2 billion worth of goods to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states in the 1st seven months of the current Iranian calendar year. Secretary of EAEU Desk of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) Elham Haji-Karimi stated that \$1.261 billion worth of non-oil products was exported from the country to the member states of the union between March 21 to October 22, 2025.

In this period, Iran's maximum products were exported to the Republic of Belarus, followed by Armenia, she underlined. She emphasized that Iran has high potentials to export its products to the lucrative EAEU export target market, especially in the commodity groups including car, automotive parts, textiles and apparels, medicine and medical equipment, food industry, etc.



IRANIAN CUISINE

IRANIAN FOOD: IRANIAN OKRA STEW WITH BEEF



Not done with the puddings. It is the white colored pudding's turn, Shir Berenj. It is made of rice and milk. The ingredients are very at hand and there is no doubt the result is worth it. This pudding is so filling and can be used as a substantial meal. It can be served as a hot or cold dish, better to be served hot in cold days of winter.

Shir Berenj (Persian: شیربرنج) is a Persian rice pudding flavored with rose water, spices such as cinnamon or cardamom, and often containing almonds.[1][2][3] It may be served warm or chilled as a dessert.

You can add powdered sugar to the dish and make it sweet, that enhances the warmth of it too.

Children would love the pudding. good news is that the instructions are super easy to follow.



TRADE & ECONOMY

IRAN, VIETNAM EXPLORE JOINT INVESTMENT, FINANCIAL COOPERATION



Iranian and Vietnamese officials and private-sector representatives discussed ways to expand joint investment and financial cooperation, with a focus on building long-term economic ties and using Vietnam as a gateway to Southeast Asia.

Mehdi Azadvari, head of the Association of Iranian and Foreign Joint Investments, said cooperation with Iran's Financial Center, the World Business Organization and several Iran-Vietnam and ASEAN joint chambers of commerce was on the agenda, with negotiations under way to expand partnerships centered on joint investment.

Speaking at the association's seasonal gathering at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Azadvari said the association's newly elected board had signed several memoranda of understanding with domestic and foreign institutions over the past three months to improve services for members.

TEHRAN CHAMBER, JETRO SIGN PACT TO DEEPEN IRAN-JAPAN ECONOMIC TIES

Iran's private sector has stepped up efforts to expand economic cooperation with Japan, as the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) signed a cooperation agreement with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), officials said.

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed at a meeting attended by senior Iranian and Japanese economic and political figures, including the head of the Tehran chamber, Japan's ambassador to Iran and Iran's deputy foreign minister for economic diplomacy.

The two sides stressed the importance of preserving ties under sanctions while preparing the groundwork for a rapid expansion of relations in a post-sanctions environment.



IRAN SPORTS

IRAN'S WOMEN'S FUTSAL TEAM INVITED TO BRAZIL



Mozaffar said that following the conclusion of the World Cup, the Brazilian team expressed strong interest in playing a friendly match against Iran.

“Brazil is planning to organize a four-team tournament and is very eager for the Iranian national team to take part. The final details and the other participating teams have not yet been determined,” she said.

Iran's women's national futsal team lost 4-1 to Brazil in its opening match of the 2025 FIFA Women's Futsal World Cup.

IRAN'S PARA TAEKWONDO ATHLETES SNATCH THREE GOLDS AT 2025 AYPG

Abolfazl Imani defeated Uzbekistan's Fayyozbek Valijonov 2-1 in the final of the Seniors Male-K44 -58 / Seniors -58kg, according to Tehran Times.

China's Weiyu Bao and South Korean Pyeong-gang Lee settled for bronze in the weight class.



Amirhossein Alizadeh seized a gold medal at the Seniors Male-K44 -63 / Seniors -63kg after defeating Uzbekistan Muhammadsodik Usmonov 2-1 in the final match.

Lin Pan of China and Bahrain's Ebrahim Samqa won two bronze medals.

Maryam Abdollahpour beat her compatriot Zahra Rahim 2-1 in the final bout of the Seniors Female-K44 -57 / Seniors -57kg.

China's Ziyue Xu and Kamola Juraeva from Uzbekistan claimed two bronzes.

Furthermore, Zahra Soltani of Iran lost to China's Bo Yan in the final of the Seniors Female-K44 -47 / Seniors -47kg.

Uzbekistan's Kizlarkhon Isomiddinova and Renu Tamang of Nepal claimed two bronze medals.

Iran has sent 194 Para athletes to the Games in 11 sports.



DISCOVER IRAN IN PICTURES

A GLANCE AT TOURIST VILLAGE OF ANBARAN WITH BREATHTAKING VIEW

With its traditional architecture, Anbaran Tourist Village is a tourist destination on the shared Iran-Azerbaijan border in Ardabil Province, and is the destination of many tourists from Iran and the world.

